

A Four-Stage Progressive AIPE Model for College English Translation Teaching

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Abstract:

College English translation teaching is now facing two challenges: it needs to help students learn how to work with AI, while still making sure they can pass the CET-4 translation part without any help from tools. Based on AIPE collaborative teaching model and the level-based reform at Yangtze University, the paper lays out a four-stage progressive AIPE collaborative teaching model across four semesters. The model concentrates AIPE training in the third semester through three-version comparison and hands-on practice, aiming to develop students' translation judgment and collaboration. This model offers a workable solution that balances CET-4 requirements and the skills needed in the AI era.

Keywords:

AIPE Collaborative Teaching Model, Four-stage Progressive Design, College English Translation Teaching, Level-based Teaching

1. Introduction

Since the launch of ChatGPT in late 2022, translation models have been shifting from Machine Translation Post-editing (MTPE) to Artificial Intelligence Post-editing (AIPE). As an emerging collaborative mode between humans and artificial intelligence, AIPE is gradually supplanting MTPE and becoming the industry standard, thanks to its enhanced interactivity, sophisticated contextual comprehension, and advanced intelligence.[1] Human-machine interaction has moved into a new phase of human-AI collaboration. Given this, translation education is under increasing pressure to shift its focus: the old model centered on language conversion is giving way to a broader, more multidimensional view of competence.

Along with the technological shifts in the translation industry, foreign language education reform in China is also moving forward at a rapid pace. The College English Teaching Guide (2020 Edition) [2] makes it clear that college English teaching should follow the principles of differentiated and individualized instruction, while reflecting each institution's unique characteristics. Take Yangtze University as an example: the college English curriculum has been reformed into a two-year, continuous system with a 14-credit model. According to the English placement test scores of newly enrolled undergraduate students, three levels—elementary, intermediate, and advanced—are determined in accordance with the different objectives for non-English major undergraduates. The advanced level corresponds to the “advanced objectives,” the intermediate level corresponds to the “intermediate

objectives,” and the elementary level corresponds to the “elementary objectives.” The advanced level accounts for approximately 40% of students, the intermediate level for 40% and the elementary level for 20%. For the three-levels students, the paper focuses on college English translation teaching for intermediate-level students. During the first two semesters, they center on basic language competences, while elective courses are offered in the third and fourth semesters related to English language learning. More importantly, they are required to take the College English Test Band 4 (CET-4) in the second semester, in which their translation competence is examined without the aid of tools.

The digital transformation of translation education and the role of AI have become hot topics in academic circles. Geng and Hu [3] analyzed the post-editing performance of ChatGPT for both the English-to-Chinese and Chinese-to-English translated texts and found that ChatGPT performed well in Chinese-to-English translation proofreading and polishing; yet, its post-editing performance in English-to-Chinese translation proofreading and polishing was unsatisfactory. Wang and Wang [4] constructed and verified the effectiveness of the teaching model of “ChatGPT + MTPE” interactive post-editing competence, providing theoretical and empirical implications for AI-empowered translation teaching in the ChatGPT era. Wang et al. [5] reviewed the evolution of technology-driven translation models, explored the driving factors behind this evolution, and offered suggestions. Jia [6] conducted an experiment using an online translation project management platform integrated with ChatGPT-4 to explore the potential of integrating generative AI technology with professional translation technologies. Moreover, Wang and Zheng [7] explored how to fully utilize modern technology to construct a cultivation model for enhancing students’ post-editing competence, based on translation teaching practices using the “Yixuejia” platform and a self-built “Customs Large Language Model” platform. Wang and Liu [1] examined the evolution of translation modes from human translation to Machine Translation Post-Editing (MTPE), and further to Artificial Intelligence Post-Editing (AIPE), while analyzing their impact on translation education.

The studies mentioned above offer both theoretical guidance and empirical support for AIPE teaching. Still, there are a few gaps. For one thing, most research on Artificial Intelligence Post-Editing focuses on translation majors, leaving non-English majors largely overlooked when it comes to systematic teaching approaches. For another, many studies fail to take into account the realities of level-based teaching reforms and reduced teaching periods, so the practicality of their proposed models remains untested. Also, there is still no clear path that runs through the whole college English curriculum to balance the “tool-free” requirement of CET-4 with the higher-order skill of human-AI collaboration needed in the AI era. To address these issues, the paper draws on the AIPE collaborative teaching model and the practice of level-based college English reform at Yangtze University to develop a four-stage progressive AIPE collaborative teaching model. The aim is to offer a workable theoretical framework and practical pathway for reforming college English translation teaching in the AI era.

2. Construction of the Four-Stage Progressive AIPE Collaborative Teaching Model

2.1. Principles of Construction

When designing the teaching model, several factors need to be considered. For one thing, college English now uses level-based teaching, with intermediate students required to take CET-4 in their second semester—where their translation competences are tested without any tools. For another, total teaching periods for theory courses have been cut significantly compared to before the reform, so translation teaching has to be more intensive and efficient.

According to the above mentioned, the construction of the teaching model adheres to the following principles: Translation competence should develop step by step, from basic to more advanced levels. At the same time, key breakthroughs need to be made within limited teaching periods. The strategies and skills students gain through AIPE training should also transfer to other tasks, such as translating without AI tools and writing academic papers. Finally, Variation Translation Theory provides the operational basis, while the AIPE collaborative model offers the overall framework for building competence.

2.2. Progressive Competence Development Pathway

The teaching model is guided by the concept of laying a solid foundation, then achieving concentrated breakthroughs, and ultimately applying autonomously. AIPE training is concentrated in the third semester to form a four-stage progressive competence development pathway(see table 1).

Table 1. *The Pathway of Progressive Competence Development.*

Stage	Semester	Course	Translation Teaching Focus	Core Tasks	Periods
Elementary Stage	Semester 1	College English Reading & Writing (Intermediate) 1	Language foundation consolidation, translation awareness	Translation exercise per unit integrated into daily teaching	2-3
Test-Preparation Stage	Semester 2	College English Reading & Writing (Intermediate) 2	CET-4 preparation	Practice on CET-4 translation tasks 4-6 weeks before the test	6-8
Leap Stage	Semester 3	One of three options (including College English Reading & Writing (Intermediate) 3)	Translation competence deepening, intensive implementation of AIPE	6-8 periods for three-version comparison and AIPE hands-on practice	6-8
Application Stage	Semester 4	One of three options (not repeating the previous semester)	Application of AIPE, collaborative competence development	Cross-cultural translation tasks integrated into the course	2-3

Note: “One of three options” refers to the courses of Intercultural Communication, Understanding Contemporary China, or College English Reading & Writing (Intermediate) 3.

2.3. Teaching Design Schemes for Each Stage

2.3.1. Elementary Stage: Language Foundation Consolidation

The focus of translation teaching in the first semester is to consolidate language foundation and cultivate translation awareness. It takes about 2 to 3 periods, integrated into the course of College English Reading and Writing without a separate translation module. The teaching content mainly contains differences in sentence structures between Chinese and English, simple sentence translation exercises, and an introduction to the CET-4 translation task type. Classroom activities include in-class contrastive analysis, group discussion, and single-sentence translation exercises.

The introduction of AI at this stage is mainly through demonstration by teachers while students are not required to use AI tools. The prime objective is to enable students to recognize structural differences between Chinese and English languages and complete single-sentence translation. Therefore, it provides the basic sentence patterns for the systematic training in the second semester and cultivates the awareness of “what is a good translation” for the AIPE in the third semester.

2.3.2. Test-Preparation Stage: CET-4 Translation Competence Reinforcement

The focus of translation teaching in the second semester is to prepare CET-4. It takes about 6 to 8 periods, integrated into the College English Reading and Writing course and scheduled within the 4 to 6 weeks before the test. The teaching content mainly includes practice on CET-4 translation tasks, accumulation of high-frequency sentence patterns and vocabularies, translation methods, as well as timed mock test and commentary. Classroom activities cover in-class comment-practice integration, mock test, and peer review.

For this stage, emphasis is placed on cultivating “tool-free” independent translation competence in the absence of AI tools. The core objective is to enable students to independently complete the translation part of the CET-4, reaching or exceeding the intermediate level benchmark (71 points). Then, in the third semester, teachers can visually demonstrate the strengths and weaknesses of AI translation; students can see the gaps between their own “original translation”, the AI-generated translation, and the reference translation. Through such comparison, teachers can guide students to upgrade from the “original translation” or “AI translation” to a higher-quality version, thereby helping them understand the value of AIPE.

2.3.3. Leap Stage: Intensive Development of AIPE Competence

The third semester is the core stage of the teaching model and the focus of translation teaching in the third semester is to deepen translation competence with implementation of the AIPE. It takes about 6 to 8 periods, concentrated in weeks 10 to 16. The teaching content mainly covers the core concepts of the AIPE and Variation Translation Theory, three-version comparative analysis (AI-generated version, reference version, and AIPE final version), prompt design and human-AI interaction, syntactic restructuring and textual optimization, and cultural adaptability analysis. Classroom activities include comparing three versions, doing AIPE hands-on practice, reviewing each other’s work, and presenting their results.

During this stage, students employ free AI tools such as DeepSeek and Kimi to complete AIPE. The primary objective is to enable students to independently carry out AIPE-based translation and significantly sharpen their translation judgment.

2.3.4. Application Stage: AIPE Competence Transfer and Application

The focus of translation teaching in the fourth semester is to apply the AIPE teaching model and foster collaboration competence. It takes about 2 to 3 periods and is spread out across the course content rather than taught in one block. The teaching covers an introduction to academic translation, how to use AIPE in cross-cultural translation, translation tasks based on “Understanding Contemporary China,” and practice in transferring AIPE strategies. In class, we use task-driven teaching, project-based learning, and independent inquiry.

At this stage, students choose their own AI tools and complete real translation tasks. The main goal is to enable them to apply AIPE strategies independently, so they can tackle authentic translation work and build a foundation for translating thesis abstracts and academic writing.

3. Implementation Pathways of the Teaching Model

3.1. Pathways for Comparing AI, Reference, and AIPE Translations

Comparing three versions lies at the heart of AIPE practice. To carry it out effectively, start by choosing suitable texts—CET-4 translation tasks that students are familiar with, such as “四合院 (Siheyuan),” “中国红 (Chinese Red),” or “智能手机 (Smartphones),” which have cultural depth and clearly reveal both the strengths and weaknesses of AI translation. Once the texts are selected, set up a clear comparison framework: guide students to examine the three versions from four angles—linguistic accuracy, sentence variety, cultural adaptability, and naturalness of expression. A comparison chart can help them track and analyze differences systematically. Then, use key questions to deepen their thinking: What does the AI translation do well? Where does it fall short? Why is the reference translation better? What changes did we make to turn the raw AI output into the AIPE version? These questions push students beyond surface differences toward genuine understanding. Finally, review and refine strategies together. Based on the comparison, teachers and students can recognize what works well in AIPE, such as which prompts improve sentence structure, how to add cultural information, or how to reorganize a paragraph.

3.2. Pathways to Developing Prompt Design Skills

Prompt design is central to AIPE, and there are a few practical ways to help students develop this skill. Start with simple prompts, then gradually move to more complex ones, and finally have them design a sequence of prompts for multi-turn interactions. Give them templates that show how to improve sentences, add cultural information, polish wording, or reorganize paragraphs. Also ask students to keep a record of their prompt ideas and the back-and-forth with the AI; writing it down helps them think through their choices and internalize the skills. Regularly set aside time for students to share effective prompts with each other, because they learn a lot from seeing how others do it.

3.3. Pathways for Blending In-class and Out-of-class Learning

With limited class time, it is practical to adopt a blended model of in-class guidance and out-of-class practice. In class, we focus on three-version comparison, prompt design demonstrations, and sharing good examples. After class, students work on AIPE tasks on their own, keep a record of their interactions with the AI, write a reflection, and submit their work through an online platform.

Teachers use the online platform to provide learning materials, post assignments, grade student work, and give personalized feedback. By blending in-class and out-of-class learning in this way, students can make significant progress in AIPE skills within just 6-8 periods.

3.4. Pathways for Teaching Assessment

It is noted that a mix of formative and summative assessment is employed in the teaching model. Formative assessment covers three parts: the AIPE portfolio from the third semester (40%), which includes the AI translation, interaction logs, and the final AIPE version; class participation and presentations (20%); and the independent project outcomes from the fourth semester (20%). Summative assessment consists of a final translation test (20%) to see how well students have internalized AIPE strategies. In addition, CET-4 scores from the second semester serve as a reference point for independent translation competence, and the academic translation in the fourth semester acts as a check on transfer skills.

4. Conclusions

Based on an analysis of the graded teaching reform and the reality of reduced class periods, it is needed to develop a four-stage progressive AIPE collaborative teaching model. This model places AIPE training in the third semester and relies on essential activities such as three-version comparison and hands-on AIPE practice to develop students' ability to work with AI in translation. The model effectively bridges CET-4 preparation and higher-order skill development, offering a workable path for college English translation teaching in the AI era.

Nevertheless, several limitations should be noted. The teaching outcomes still need to be validated through large-scale empirical research. It also remains unclear how well the model suits students from different disciplinary backgrounds. In addition, the rapid evolution of AI tools poses an ongoing challenge: keeping the teaching model up to date.

Future research will need to move forward in several directions. More empirical studies are needed to test how well the teaching model actually works. Another area to explore is how to adjust teaching strategies for students from different academic backgrounds. As AI becomes deeply integrated into education, college English translation teaching must keep innovating to help prepare students for the demands of the AI era.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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